

# Gelsemium sempervirens (Carolina Jessamine)

Botanical Bytes by Bruner

By Gregory Bruner

Foliage Height: Vine 10'-40'

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Flower Height: Vine 10'-40'

Foliage Color: Dark Green

Flower Color: Yellow

USDA Hardiness: 7-9

Moisture: Average

Light: Full Sun – Part Sun



*Gelsemium sempervirens* is one of those treats to look forward to in the spring. Suddenly trees of all shapes and sizes magically sprout beautiful yellow flowers. Carolina Jessamine is not picky as to what it climbs; it just likes to climb. Its native tree-climbing territory is from Virginia to Florida, west to Texas, and farther south into Mexico and Guatemala. The wide variety of regional names stems from the shape of the flower and its long running vines. Depending on where you are viewing this beauty, it may be called Carolina Jessamine, Evening Trumpet Flower, Poor Man's Rope, False Jasmine, or Wild Woodbine.

Trees, shrubs, and fences generally explode into Jessamine glory in April and May, but the bloom time may extend from December through May, contingent upon your region of the country. The flowers are one inch to one-and-a-half inches long and often are so profuse that the lustrous dark evergreen foliage is almost totally covered with blooms. The fragrant trumpet-shaped yellow flowers are a nectar source for hummingbirds and spicebush swallowtail butterflies.

Because Carolina Jessamine is extremely adaptable, it can thrive in a wide variety of habitats, whether it's running along a chain-link fence in a suburban yard or climbing a dogwood at the edge of the woods. It appreciates an average moisture level, but the soil type can range from a rich loam to clay or even sandy. It may be best known as a climbing vine, but I have occasionally seen it used as a very effective evergreen ground cover.

This wonderful vine is simple to grow and has no major insect or disease issues. Pruning is not necessary but does help in shaping young plants. This pruning should be done soon after flowering finishes in the spring.

*Gelsemium sempervirens* has a long history of medicinal and homeopathic uses, ranging from treating fevers and the flu to sore throats and the common cold. However, the leaves, stems, and roots can be poisonous if ingested in large amounts. This possible toxicity makes it advisable not to plant Carolina Jessamine along fence rows where cows, horses, or other livestock could munch on large quantities of the leaves.

Carolina Jessamine is an excellent easy-to-grow addition to any garden in need of some early spring color. Whether you are a beginning butterfly gardener or an old hummingbird hunter, give this one a try!